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Message Text

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14
ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 COME-00 EB-07 INR-07 LAB-04

NSAE-00 SIL-01 DOTE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 L-03 NSC-05

PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 /071 W
---------- 089979
R 040621Z NOV 76
FM AMEMBASSY HELSINKI
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 0655
INFO AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN
AMEMBASSY OSLO
AMEMBASSY STOCKHOLM

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: ELAB, FI
SUBJECT: STRIKE SHUTS DOWN FINNISH RAILROADS

REFS: A. HELSINKI 2296, B. HELSINKI 2281

1. SUMMARY: THE TRAIN DISPATCHERS' STRIKE HAS FORCED A FOUR-DAY CLOSE-DOWN OF VIRTUALLY ALL RAIL TRAFFIC IN FINLAND. END SUMMARY.

2. INFORMAL COOPERATION BY OTHER RAIL WORKERS IN THE ILLEGAL STRIKE CALLED BY DISPATCHERS NOVEMBER 2 (REF A) HAS FORCED THE FINNISH RAILROAD TO CEASE ALL OPERATIONS EXCEPT FOR MAINTENANCE TRAFFIC.ALTHOUGH THE STRIKE WAS NOT OFFICIALLY SUPPORTED BY THE DISPATCHERS' OWN RAILROAD CIVIL SERVANTS UNION (RVL) OR ITS PARENT FEDERATION (TVK), OR BY THE BULK OF OTHER RAILROAD WORKERS AFFILIATED WITH THE LEADING FEDERATION (SAK), MOST RAIL WORKERS HAVE MADE CLEAR THAT THEY ARE NOT WILLING FOR "SAFETY REASONS" TO WORK WITHOUT DISPATCHERS. IN VIEW OF THIS POSITION THE RAILROAD ABANDONED ITS INTENTION TO MAINTAIN SOME COMMUTER AND FREIGHT SERVICE.
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3. THE GOVERNMENT CONTENDS THAT THE STRIKERS' DEMAND
FOR REDUCTION OF THE RETIREMENT AGE IS NON-NEGOTIABLE
AND IS CONSIDERING ENDING THE IMPASSE BY SEEKING A PAR-
LIAMENTARY BILL STIFFENING THE PENALTIES FOR ILLEGAL
STRIKES. ACTUAL PASSAGE OS SUCH A BILL IS NOT CERTAIN
BUT THE GOVERNMENT HOPES TO USE THIS TACTIC TO DISCOURAGE
THE DISPATCHERS FROM CONTINUING THE STRIKE AFTER ITS
SCHEDULED SUSPENSION NOVEMBER 6.

4. THERE ARE TWO ISSUES DEVELOPING. THE FIRST CONCERNS
THE ILLEGAL OR WILDCAT STRIKE AS AN ECONOMIC WEAPON.
THE SAK REAFFIRMED ON OCTOBER 29 THAT IT WILL NOT FOR
THE TIME BEING USE STRIKES TO PRESSUE THE GOVERNMENT
AND EMPLOYERS INTO GRANTING CURRENT INCOMES POLICY DEMANDS
BY FINNISH LABOR ORGANIZATIONS (REF B), AND THE RETIREMENT
AGE QUESTION IS NOT INCLUDED IN THOSE DEMANDS. HOWEVER,
THE WILLINGNESS OF SAK MEMBER TO COOPERATE IN THIS TRIKE
AND THE ACTIONS'S CLEAR EFFECT ON THE ECONOMY INDICATE THAT
THE ATTRACTIVENESS OF THE STRIKE TACTIC REMAINS STRONG.

5. THE OTHER ISSUE INVOLVES THE GOVERNMENT'S REACTION TO
THE STRIKE. THE PROPOSED BILL WOULD REPORTEDLY APPLY TO
WILDCAT STRIKES IN GENERAL, IN ANTICIPATION OF FUTURE
LABOR MARKET CONFRONTATIONS IN A SERIIUS ECONOMIC
SITUATION. THERE IS BROAD LACK OF SYMPATHY FOR THE
STRIKERS AND THIS MAY OUTWEIGH ABHORRENCE TOWARD
RESTRICTION OF THE RIGHT TO STRIKE AT LEAST ON THE
PART OF THE NON-LEFTIST PARTIES. PASSAGE OR ATTEMPTED
PASSAGE OF SUCH A BILL BY THESE PARTIES - WHO HAVE A
PARLIAMENTARY MAJORITY - OVER THE OPPOSITION OF THE
WORKER PARTIES COULD CONTRIBUTE TO AN UNHELPFUL POLARIZA-
TION OF LEFT AND NON-LEFT ON LABOR ISSUES.
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